

High Expectations Work Group July 22, 2014 Meeting Notes

Present: Tom Taggart, Chair; Senator Steven Thayne; Cheryl Charlton; Alan Millar; and Jason Hancock, Cindy Wilson

Others present: Jacob Smith, Director of Operations, Idaho Digital Learning Academy (IDLA); Matt McCarter, State Department of Education; Dana Kelly, Marilyn Whitney and Tracie Bent, Office of the State Board of Education.

Chairman Tom Taggart reviewed the topics of discussion for the meeting: Mastery-based education systems; implication of Advanced Opportunities programs; career counseling and advising, including the Near-Peer program; and finalizing the topics for the Joint Structure and Governance Committee report on July 28, 2014.

Alan Millar reviewed with the committee a draft report he had written for discussion, with the recommendation that Mastery-based education in Idaho take a two-pronged approach:

- In K-6, pilot programs would be encouraged and funded by the State, together with professional development to assist districts and schools with implementation.
- In grades 7-12, students would be encouraged to participate in Idaho's Advanced Opportunities programs, including the 8 in 6, Early Completers and Fast Forward.

The committee discussed the Advanced Opportunities programs at length. They agreed that the 8 in 6 should generally remain as it is for the present time with the caution that professional-technical education (PTE) courses should be included. Jacob Smith cautioned that revamping programs too quickly or drastically defeats a sense of program continuity.

Dana Kelly, Student Affairs Program Manager, Office of the State Board of Education, said that in thinking about student participation in fees, requiring a flat fee, rather than a percentage is advantageous to student, districts and OSBE. Percentage calculations can create unanticipated barriers to participation.

Additionally, if districts are required to pay for dual credits and then await reimbursement, additional resistance can be generated. Ms. Kelly suggested that postsecondary institutions all have in place a method for paying third-party billings. Since those institutions work in collaboration with districts for dual credit courses, the third-party billing systems might ease the financial burden on districts. In essence, the postsecondary institution would delay billing the districts until the State reimbursement had been received. An agreement template is being reviewed by the financial vice presidents at the institutions now.

The Fast Forward program currently pays up to \$200 per year for juniors and \$400 for seniors for dual credit courses, and advanced placement courses and tests. Alan Millar

envisioned a future goal whereby every portable, transferable course taken by Idaho students is funded by the State. He further envisioned that the Advanced Opportunities for Early Completers would be folded into Fast Forward in the future. Since Fast Forward was implemented in July 2014, the committee agreed not to make any further changes at this time, but to collect and analyze data over the next two years to evaluate the program.

The committee agreed to recommend that the 25% student participation fee in Fast Forward be removed to eliminate barriers to those needing it most and to simplify reimbursement to districts. While all members agreed that students should participate in costs in order to encourage “ownership”, they agreed that associated costs, such as books, fulfill this purpose.

The 8 in 6 program allows grades 7-12 to complete 8 years in 6 by taking online overload or summer courses. The goal is not to graduate students early, but to fulfill general education graduation requirements early in order to participate in dual credit and scholarship programs.

The committee agreed to recommend removing the restriction of 10 percent student participation. The committee further agreed to remove the restriction of online courses and allow courses at traditional schools as well.

The committee recognized that advanced opportunity programs would ultimately create a shortage of high school teachers qualified to teach the courses. Leadership premiums will create an incentive for teachers to teach dual credit courses, however not all teachers have Master’s degrees. The committee discussed whether postsecondary institutions could be incentivized to modify their course requirements to allow teachers to “challenge” courses in their content areas.

Tom Taggart said that not enough is done at the K-6 level to prepare students for advanced opportunities, especially Gifted and Talented and students interested in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) areas. He questioned whether summer programs could be funded. Matt McCarter, Director, Student Engagement and Postsecondary Readiness, State Department of Education, said that millions of dollars in grants are available from the federal government and other funding sources. He suggested the State Department of Education could be encouraged to seek these funding opportunities. The committee noted the economic inequity among Idaho’s school districts and hoped that priority could be given to rural areas.

The committee reviewed a new scholarship program authored by Ryan Kerby, Superintendent, New Plymouth School District, and candidate for State House of Representatives. Marilyn Whitney added that the State Board of Education is considering an opportunity scholarship with \$1 million in matching funds which could tie into any proposed legislation. With minor corrections, the committee agreed to support a new legislative proposal.

The committee agreed that more career counseling is needed in Idaho in order to reach the 60 per goal. Tom Taggart suggested a block grant by regions which could be used for AVID, Near Peer, career counselors, or to train teachers as career counselors. Cindy Wilson supported the idea of training teachers, since most students do not have an emotional connection with their counselors. She also strongly supported the AVID program which has proven results in Idaho and elsewhere and is designed to reach the “middle” group of students, rather than the top quartile. Alan Millar said that he had tried training teachers and then found that they did not do the job so he hired a dedicated career counselor.

Jessica Piper said that the Collaborative Counseling Training Institute offered a 13 week professional development course for counselors which was offered free through the College Access Challenge Grant. It “fizzled” because so much time was required and the course was difficult to finish. The course has not been modified into three segments to facilitate completion. The IDLA has agreed to facilitate this program.

The discussed committee their recommendation. They agreed that:

- Career Counseling is key to achieving Idaho’s 60% goal.
- A position should be created at the State Department of Education to focus on career counseling in all districts.

Jessica Piper, Scholarship Program Manager, State Board of Education, introduced the College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) which is a formula grant offered to states by the U.S. Department of Education. It began in 2008, and Idaho will potentially receive roughly 12-24 more months of funding. Idaho’s grant proposal focuses on Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion, direct services to students and career counselor training.

Using best practices from the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), some areas of Idaho have adopted the Near-Peer program developed in Alaska for providing near peer mentors in school districts that demonstrate financial need and the capacity to create a college-going culture. The Near Peer Mentor Program targets low income, rural, under-represented, often first-generation students in schools where the Free and Reduced Lunch Program covers over 50% of students. Currently, the Near Peer Mentor Program operates in the Lake Pend Oreille, Post Falls, Lakeland, Weiser, Sugar-Salem and Jefferson County School Districts.

Recent college graduates are hired on a one-year contract, renewable for an additional year, to mentor with high school students in areas of FAFSA applications, important deadlines, college applications, etc. They host parent nights, college admissions advisors and military recruiters, and college application week. They also give presentations to high school classes about important benchmarks so that students learn to access available opportunities. Near Peers have considerable interaction with students and are readily accepted by them because of their age similarity and recent college experience.

The Near Peer Mentor Program has been funded through CACG as a classified position; however that funding stream will be eliminated in 18 months. CACG is entering into cost-

share arrangements with districts, and hope that institutions will continue to shift recruiting dollars to support the program.

CACG tracks student interactions, presentations, FAFSA completions and college acceptances. FAFSA completions are particularly useful: national studies indicate that approximately 90% of those completing FAFSA applications go on to college.